

Social support for physical activity on social network sites: a content analysis

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Objective:

Sharing of physical activity related statuses on social network sites (e.g. 'Just completed a 3.4 mi walk') is becoming increasingly common. Often, these statuses are posted with an expectation of receiving feedback from online peers. The aim of our research was to determine the nature of this feedback and more specifically, to what extent it contains social support.

Methods:

A deductive qualitative content analysis was performed on 2533 comments ("@-replies") on 882 physical activity related statuses posted on the social network site Twitter. Cutrona & Suhr 's (1992) typology of social support was used as classification framework. The typology distinguishes information support, tangible assistance, network support, esteem support and emotional support.

Results/findings:

43.6% of the comments contained one or more types of social support defined in the typology. Esteem support, expressed as compliments for completion of physical activity was most prevalent and found in 28.9% of the comments. Information support occurred in 9.9%, emotional support in 4.2% and tangible assistance in 0.6% of the comments. 9.6% contained expression of gratitude for social support provided in a preceding comment.

Conclusions:

Social media are used for posting physical activity related tweets. These status updates are often replied to by online peers. As our analysis indicates, this mostly implies endorsing or congratulating the poster for his/her achievements. The expressions of gratitude found in the analysis also indicate significant appreciation for this source of social support. Our methodology could easily be applied to analogous nutrition related status updates as well.